

Ethics of pre implantation genetic testing philosophy essay



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Humanity revolves around procreation. We need to reproduce in order to produce future generations. In the past few years, science and medicine has gained an immense amount of knowledge about pregnancy and the underlying developmental stages of how it works. Furthermore, science is progressively improving, resulting in our ability to diagnose, manipulate and sometimes treat genetic abnormalities. Procedures such as the pre-implantation genetic diagnosis (PGD) were developed as a means to avoid selective abortions by detecting that the embryo is free of terrible lethal genetic diseases such as Huntington's disease. However, recently PGD has been raising some ethical questions as people began using this technology for medically unrelated and unjustified reasons. Vanity and secondary motives of patients who use PGD for the creation of 'designer babies' and 'savior siblings' violates the fundamental principle of morality. Using PGD for reasons other than justified genetic testing is impermissible because it treats the potential baby as a means not as ends in itself; therefore, it violates Kant's second categorical imperative.

Scientific Background

PGD works through a process of In Vitro Fertilization (IVF). In this procedure, "multiple eggs are produced, retrieved from the ovaries and [manually] fertilized with the husband's sperm" in a laboratory, outside of the female body³. As the embryos develop in vitro, embryo biopsy is performed by removing a single cell from each three day old embryo⁴. These cells are analyzed-by a variety of methods-for particular chromosomal or genetic abnormalities in order to distinguish which embryos are free of genetic

disease. Normal, healthy embryos are then transferred into the uterus where they can grow and develop into a healthy child.

Arguments

Kant

Immanuel Kant came up with a moral philosophy that was based on a theory of the “Categorical Imperative.” These are valid principles based off of the concept of duty that must be obeyed by all and are good in and of themselves. The second categorical imperative states that one should “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, always at the same time as an end and never merely as a means to an end”². In other words, one has perfect duty to not use someone as a means to achieve a personal goal. This principle of rationality formulates the core of moral law and requirements that rational agents must follow. Furthermore, each rational being has autonomy, or a free will to define their own law. However, possession of autonomy by each being implies that all persons should be treated equally, with the same amount of respect and one cannot infringe on the others rational will. The intuitive essence of humanity, therefore, objects to using others as a mere tool because it overlooks one’s integrity and humanness. So, one cannot assert a moral right to own a person-like a piece of property-because proprietary right over a person denies any existence of a free rational action; furthermore, it denies the person a right to be an end in themselves. But, humans have value and worth; hence, they require to be respected. Each person deserves to be respected for his/her integral being (of who they are). While PGD is performed on fetuses, its use is still unjustified because fetuses

are potential persons and therefore, require the same amount of respect as any other person. Furthermore, the use of PGD in creating 'designer babies' and 'savior siblings' violates Kant's second categorical imperative.

Designer Babies

A very compelling argument against PGD arises out of its questionable potential use in creating perfect 'designer babies.' The technology behind PGD would allow parents to select specific and nonessential traits (such as eye color, height, athletic ability, even intelligence) that they want their child to express. Such technology is reminiscent of the Build-a-Bear Workshop but for grown-ups. Using PGD as a means for eugenics is fallacious and unjustified in many ways, such as its violation of the second categorical imperative.

Parents have abused PGD use in order to have it cater to their individual conceited expectations of creating a 'perfect child.' They vainly pick and chose the traits they find beneficial and get rid of ones they find 'unhealthy' or 'unperfect' so they could satisfy their goal of not having a financially and socially burdensome child. Not only is this wrong because it discriminates against the disabled but also because it violates the core value of humanity by infringing upon the child's autonomous will by treating him/her as a means to an inappropriate end. The parents social and economic ends are being pursued while the child's ends are being neglected. In 'designing' a child, parents destruct the child's will (in a few different ways) therefore, they fail to treat them as an end in themselves. Physically, parents annihilate certain features their child would naturally possess (not to mention the obliteration of unwanted fetuses). By doing so, parents fail to treat the child

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humanely. Also, altering mental abilities of a child is deceptive and confuses their will. Hence, it overlooks the rational ability of a-potential-rational agent and his/her end in himself/herself. Finally, parents restrict their child's will by altering their whole mental and physical being and not allowing them to pursue their individual goals as they see fit⁴. In order for the mental and physical humanity to be treated as an end, one's will must exist. However, when parents select traits for their child, they overlook their child's dignified and humane right to be how they were naturally meant to be. They use their child as a means to reach some vain, social or economical end, therefore, violating Kant's second categorical imperative. Every human being is a rational agent (even the fetus which is a potential person) and has autonomy; therefore, one should not be treated as a means to an end. Because the use of PGD allows parents to use their children as a means to an unjustified end, its use is impermissible.

Savior Siblings

Another issue with using PGD rises out of its unjustified creation of 'savior siblings.' A 'savior sibling' is a child created by tissue typing and help of PGD in hope of providing a perfect HLA-match for the seriously sick sibling in order to save his/her life. While the engineered child does not benefit or is harmed, the implications of such procedure are morally unethical. It objectifies the child, viewing him/her as a mere commodity, disregarding the child's humane right to equality. Treating such child as a tool to cure another violates an ethical principle of treating a person as an end in himself/herself (violates the second CI) because it uses the child as a means for which to treat the unhealthy older sibling. Such applications of PGD resemble slavery,

where the savior child is a 'slave' and the parent is a slave-owner. The parent would possess a right to own the 'slave' child affirming the child as a commodity. But a child is not an object to have possession over; the child is a person who requires respect and possesses an autonomous will to be an end in himself/herself. Therefore, creating a 'slave' or 'savior sibling' would violate the categorical imperative due to the demotion of the child's free rational action. Thus, use of PGD for the creation of 'savior (slave) siblings' is unjustified because it strongly violates Kant's second categorical imperative.

Furthermore, creation of 'savior siblings' leads to other problems. In addition to being unethical, there is a strong belief that a child's profound identity would be impaired. They would be viewed as a secondary gain, a tool solely designed for the purpose of saving another life. This impaired will of the child would lead to countless psychological problems. The mental aspect of the child's humane nature would be compromised-the child would lack self-esteem and self-respect-as he/she would not be praised for his/her individual value but rather as a means to a particular end. Parents, by using PGD for instrumentalization of their children, would violate the child's autonomous will and individual personal value by using them as mere means to parental ends and "limit[ing] a child's right to an open future" 4.

In sum, PGD promotes unjustified creation of 'designer babies' and 'savior siblings.' The use of this technology allows parents to use their children (or potential children) as a means to satisfy their parental end; therefore, neglecting the child's autonomous will to be an end in himself/herself. Thus

using PGD to create ‘ designer babies’ and ‘ savior siblings’ is impermissible because it violates Kant’s second categorical imperative.

Opposition

PGD is argued to be unethical in this paper; however, others view its use acceptable and nothing more than a legitimate autonomous right of parents to produce healthy children. They believe that because parents are the most socially and economically affected by the birth of a child, then they should have the right and freedom to choose the identity of their offspring. Having a healthy child is in the parents interest because it is less socially and financially constraining and burdensome. Besides, being healthy is in the best interest of the child as well. The child would want to live a happy and healthy life, free of disease. If PGD can provide a tool for removing such lethal and stigmatizing disease form society, then it should be perfectly plausible to be able to use it. Parents have a right to choose what it best for their children and family; therefore, using PGD as a means that will allow them to select for traits they see best fit for their child would be perfectly justified.

Rebuttal

However, while these are plausible reasons for the use of PGD, they are not strong enough to justify its immoral applications. Every single individual- even the potential person and the disabled- has a right to autonomy. No one can or should be able to define what life is worth living; furthermore, no one can impose the quality of life of principle on another. As previously stated, we can not say that the disabled lead a good or a bad life; it is simply not for us to decide. In fact, values of good and bad are of human conception and <https://assignbuster.com/ethics-of-pre-implantation-genetic-testing-philosophy-essay/>

will vary from person to person. Parents need to take responsibility, financially and mentally for their child regardless of its physical well-being. Good parents do not choose; furthermore, they do not use their child as a means to appease their interest of having a less socially and financially constraining life. Using PGD for vain reasons is never morally justified. Using PGD for medicinal reasons is appropriate; however, using it for ‘designer babies’ and ‘savior siblings’ violates the fundamental principle of ethics (Kant’s second categorical imperative) and therefore, can never be morally justified.

Conclusion

In conclusion, PGD has revolutionized reproduction. It has granted access into a remote realm by allowing persons to select favorable genetic characteristics of offspring before implantation. However, while its promising view of the world without suffering and disease sounds appealing, moral justifications of PGD and its policy raise many concerns. More specifically, some of the issues with the use of this technology deal with the unjustified creation of ‘designer babies’ and ‘savior siblings.’ These are serious issues, the implications of which can have destructive and irreversible consequences on the present and future generations. While some of the applications of PGD may be accepted; nevertheless, as of now, the risks outweigh the benefits. It is not medicine’s role to make one more socially accepted or be better-off. Those are not the types of standards for us to decide. Intentional destruction of potential human life is never justified. PGD runs on a dangerously thin line of potential medicinal benefit and playing God. It also violates Kant’s second categorical imperative by treating fetuses

as a mere means to an end. Therefore, until clear, strictly medicinal and ethical applications of PGD are established, the use of this technology can not be justified.